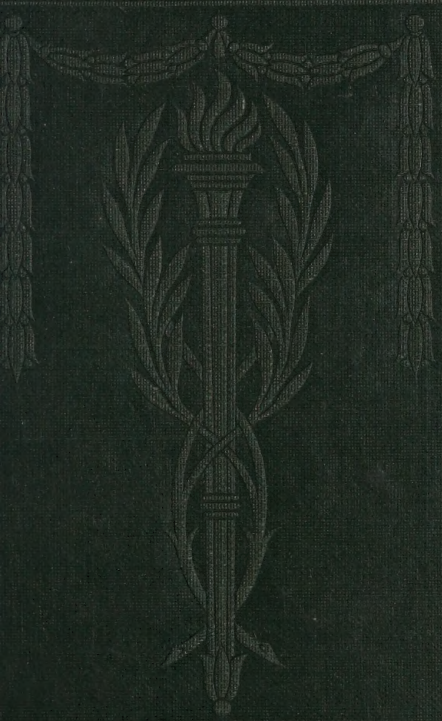
TOLSTOY

EDWARD GARNETT



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TOLSTOY

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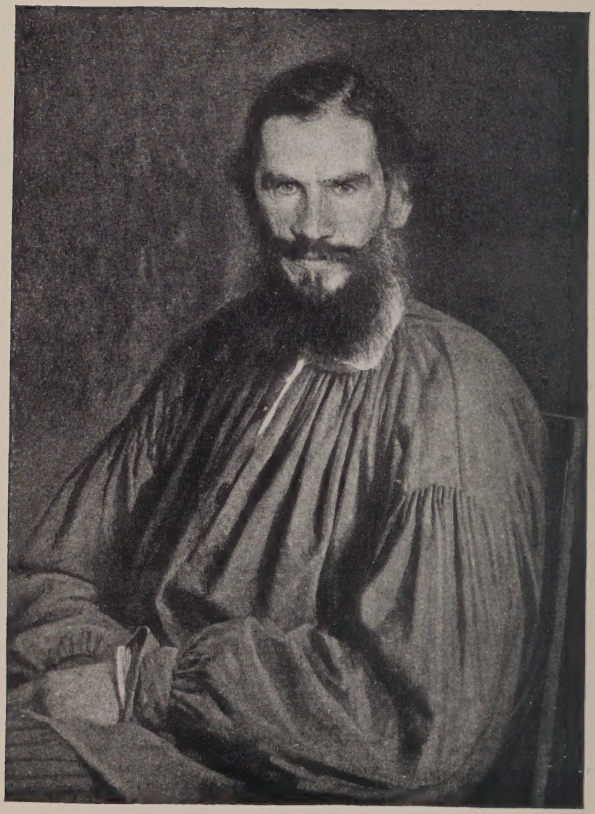

TOLSTOY

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TOLSTOY

HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS

BY

EDWARD GARNETT

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FOREWORD

M. Halpérine-Kaminsky tells us that Maxime Gorky once said in his hearing—"Far from being carved out of one block Tolstoy was infinitely various and multiple. Each time that I saw him he appeared to me a new personality"—a judgment on the great Russian that Englishmen particularly should bear in mind.

In this brief sketch of Tolstoy's life and works I am under obligation to various authorities, cited in the Appendix, especially to the "Life" by Mr. Aylmer Maude, whose work is indispensable to those who view Tolstoy from other standpoints.

Edward Garnett.

November, 1913.

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TOLSTOY
HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS

I

EARLY YEARS—THE CAUCASUS—SEBASTOPOL

"Our ancestors live again in us," says the proverb, and Leo Tolstoy (*b.* August 28, 1828, at Yasnaya Polyana) shows the richest commingling of ancestral talents and characteristics fused in a titanic pattern. His forbears, on both the paternal and maternal side, included many men illustrious in Russian history, such as Count Peter Tolstoy, the adroit, unscrupulous minister of Peter the Great, and his maternal grandfather, Prince Nicolai Volkonsky, Commander-in-Chief in Catherine's reign. The account given by Tolstoy of his near relatives[1] yields the most variegated contrasts in human qualities, of

[1] P. Birukoff: *Leo Tolstoy.* Vol. I, chap. III.–IV.

which Tolstoy's genius is the amalgam. One might instance his three brothers, the aristocratic, fastidious Sergey, the passionate, consumptive Dmitri, always in excess, the delightful, modest and acute Nicolai, who "practised the humility of life that Leo preached theoretically," and his pious aunt, Tatiana, who taught him "the spiritual delight of love," also the photograph of Tolstoy and his sister, Marie, in nun's dress, which yields instructive evidence. The stern sadness, sunken cheeks, and austere expression of Marie's face is unrelieved by the air of command and fighting force which animates her brother Leo's eyes. The religious fanaticism of a suffering and questioning nature was doubled in Tolstoy with the personality of a joyously vital, richly sensuous "pagan prince," as Merezhkovsky affirms. The strange fusion of these two men in one character is the source of Tolstoy's creative power. Again, the dualism of aristocrat and peasant formed his bearing, as Sergeyenko tells us.[1] From

[1] "His face was a true peasant's face: simple, rustic, with a broad nose, a weather-beaten skin, and thick over-

birth to death these two antagonistic elements strove in him for the mastery, meeting like explosive gases and blazing forth in his genius, which even in early childhood showed itself in an incredibly full consciousness of life and the registration of more impressions, sensations, and emotions than many men can claim in a lifetime. It would be a radical mistake to exalt one of these strains above the other, for each found its nutriment in their conjunction, and it is the sublimation of the moralist in the artist and the artist in the moralist that made Tolstoy's lifework a revelation, an interpretation and a deep-standing criticism of European Society.

In his book *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth* (1852–7) Tolstoy has analysed closely his own growth, mental and spiritual,

hanging brows, from beneath which, small, keen, grey eyes peered sharply forth. . . . One instantly divines in Tolstoy a man of the highest society,—well-bred with polished, unconstrained manners. . . ."

"On the one hand an insatiable thirst for power over people, and on the other an unconquerable ardour for inward purity and the sweetness of meekness. . . ."

"In this chain of seething, imperious instincts linked with delicate spiritual organisation lies the profound tragicness of Tolstoy's personality."

How Count Tolstoy Lives and Works. By P. A. Sergeyenko.

in the family circle, and in his student life at Kazan University. His leading traits were a passionate ardour, acute self-consciousness, an intense craving for moral perfection, and a biting sincerity. The moralist is specially in evidence in the private diary he kept (1847–51) of his life at Kazan, Moscow, and St. Petersburg; but while its tone is serious and strenuous, his own outlook was ambitious, and his aristocratic environment was worldly and pleasure-loving. He is constantly struggling against the temptations of cards, wine, women, and sport, succumbing to the hot passions of youth, while incessantly framing new programmes of a refined life of study and social usefulness.[1] At twenty-two he hesitated between the life of a landowner and of a Government official, but his vacillations were cut short by a sudden resolve to return in 1851

[1] The duality of two opposing natures was even more strongly marked in Tolstoy's brother Dmitri (see *Anna Karenin*, Vol. I, p. 94). "He remembered how his brother, while at the university, and for a year afterwards, had, in spite of the jeers of his companions, lived like a monk, strictly observing all religious rites, services, and fasts, and avoiding every sort of pleasure, especially women. And afterwards how he had rushed into the most senseless debauchery."

with his brother Nicolai, then an officer, to the Caucasus, which was then the theatre of war between Russia and the Tartar tribes. Tolstoy, as a volunteer, accompanied the troops in their raids on the mountain villages and in *A Raid* (1852) and *The Wood-Felling* (1855) he gives proof of the acuteness and range of his observation, of the poetic breadth of his description, of the force of his moral vision. These same qualities are less manifest in the fragment of an unfinished novel, *A Squire's Morning* (1852), which he began in the Caucasus, after having passed his examination for the army and after having published "Childhood" in *The Contemporary*—the leading St. Petersburg magazine. It will be convenient for us to mark the broad stages of Tolstoy's development and genius by following the chronological order of his most important works. *The Cossacks* (published 1863) discloses the fermentation of two incompatible conceptions of life. In his Diary, dated Stari Yust, June 11, 1851, quoted by Birukoff,[1] Tolstoy writes: "Having written

[1] Birukoff, Vol. I, p. 124.

in my diary, I began to pray to God. . . . How I prayed God from a pure heart to accept me into his bosom. I did not feel the flesh. I was . . . but no, the carnal, trivial side again asserted itself, and an hour had not passed before I almost consciously heard the voice of vice, of vanity, and of the empty side of my life. . . . I fell asleep in dreams of game and of women." And in a letter to Moscow friends,[1] he says: "How contemptible, pitiable you all appear to me. . . . Happiness consists in being with Nature, in seeing it and holding converse with it." He hunts and gambles, and after losing 500 roubles "prays God to extricate him." He becomes a fast friend of Sado, a young Tartar, with whom he exchanges horses, and in whose company, on June 15, 1853, he narrowly escaped death or capture at the hands of the Tchetchenian enemy, Tolstoy refusing to gallop off on his friend's fleet horse. He criticises his fellow-officers' ambition to look smart and lead "a Parisian life," and earns a great reputation with them as a marvellous story-teller. He distinguishes

[1] *Idem*, Vol. I, p. 128.

himself in military exploits, but gets tired of the monotonous service, and is transferred to the army of the Danube in March, 1854, and thence to Sebastopol in November, whence he writes patriotic letters to his relatives.

By his military experiences of two years in Russian fortified posts in Caucasian villages, a few months with the Russian army in the Danube campaign, and eight months in or near Sebastopol, Tolstoy's insight into human nature was immeasurably extended and deepened. Daily thrown into contact with hundreds of men of all grades, ranks, and characters, as a sub-lieutenant, he was admirably placed for observing his superiors, for intercourse with the common soldier, and for retaining mental freedom. His idiosyncratic vice, his dislike of co-operating with others, was as necessarily checked as his field for psychological scrutiny was unlimited. His impressions of the Siege of Sebastopol, *Sebastopol*, published in three parts (1854–5), though mutilated by the Censorship, excited great interest at Court, general public attention and the eulogies of both

Turgenev and Pissemsky, the latter saying, " This young writer will eclipse us all—one might as well give up writing." In truth, Tolstoy, at twenty-six, had achieved something unique, a narrative of war true to its terrible realities, yet classically firm, objective and balanced. In all the fields of life that of a great war has been least portrayed in literature, the great writers either passing it by with averted head or treating it picturesquely or romantically. The whole truth had not been told modern Europe till now, patriotism or the bias of " the beautiful " deflecting the few writers who had experienced war's horrors. In the great mass of literature on the Napoleonic wars no writer can compare with Tolstoy for breadth and force of actuality, save, perhaps, Bourgoyne. In what does Tolstoy's superiority consist ? In his contrast of the horrors of war with the lack of realisation shown by the men who are killing one another, and their patriotic astigmatism. In his picture of the sensations of half a dozen typical Russians : Mihaylof, Kalougin, Praskouhin, Galstin,

Kozeltsof, Volodya, in their quarters, under fire on the bastions, in hospital, etc., we recognise there is presented, *for the first time*, the behaviour of the ordinary man on campaign, the man as he is and not as he thinks himself. Europe had possessed before a few pictures, externally truthful, of war shown as an affair of patriotism, honour, disease and agony, stupidity and fear, courage, etc., but never one so deep, searching, and so inexorable in the reality of the effects of war on the bodies, brains, and souls of men. Tolstoy's picture, superior in its human value, is broadly massed, exact in its details, and wide in its horizons, and the light that pours down upon the besieged Sebastopol and the encircling trenches of the French and English enemy, shows the freshness, the menace, and the ever-springing promise of the changing skies. The author's power lies in establishing the exact relations between the irresponsible individual atoms and the human significance of the scenes of carnage in which they participate. In *Sebastopol Tales* there is no absolute moral condemnation of War, as yet, but there is

the heart's appeal from the stupid animality of man's blind instincts to his spiritual nature. Tolstoy's few months' service in Sebastopol laid the whole groundwork of the future edifice of his life-work as a revolutionary mind and evolutionary force. The desire of the normal man to evade, at all costs, the repulsive facts of life, and his self-blinding faculty, this is what Tolstoy, a true Russian mind, seized upon, tearing into strips, in Sebastopol in May and August, 1855, the veils, patriotic, picturesque, romantic, etc., with which European writers had adorned the grim actualities of blood, agony, and death. Tolstoy's description, for example, of the scenes in the military hospital, and of a soldier's sensations while killing a Frenchman are unanswerable in their truth :

(1) "The sound of all sorts of groans, sighs, death-rattles, now and then interrupted by shrill screams, filled the whole room. . . .

" 'Ivan Bogaef, Private, Company iii., S—— Regiment, *fractura femuris complicata!*' shouted another doctor from the end of the room, examining a shattered leg.

" 'Turn him over.'

" ' Oh, oh, fathers! Oh, you're our fathers! ' screamed the soldier, beseeching them not to touch him.

" ' *Perforatio capitis!* '

" ' Simon Nefyordof, Lieutenant-Colonel of the N—— Infantry Regiment. Have a little patience, Colonel, or it is quite impossible; I'll have to leave you! ' said a third doctor, poking about with some sort of hook in the skull of the unfortunate Colonel.

" ' Oh, don't; oh, for God's sake be quick! be quick. Ah. . . .'

" ' *Perforatio pectoris*. . . . Sebastian Sereda, Private! . . . what regiment? But you need not write that; *moritur*. Carry him away,' said the doctor. . . ."

(2) " Then, when Pesth had freed his leg and risen, some one else ran against him from behind in the dark, and nearly knocked him down again. ' Run him through! ' some one else shouted, ' what are you stopping for? ' Then some one seized a gun and stuck it into something soft. ' *Ah Dieu!* ' cried a dreadful, piercing voice, and Pesth only then understood that he had bayoneted a Frenchman. A cold sweat covered his whole body, he trembled as in fever and threw down the gun. But this only lasted a moment; the thought immediately entered his head that he was a

hero. He again seized the gun, and shouting 'Hurrah!' ran with the crowd away from the dead Frenchman. Having run twenty paces he came to a trench. Some of our men with the Battalion Commander were there."[1]

Birukoff tells us that Tolstoy, in his Diary, on March 5, 1855, wrote: "... a great, a stupendous idea to the realisation of which I feel myself capable of devoting my life. This idea is the foundation of a new religion corresponding to the development of mankind—*the religion of Jesus, but purified from dogma and mysticism, a practical religion, not promising bliss in future, but giving happiness on earth.* ... To work consciously for *the union of mankind* by religion. ..." At the age, therefore, of twenty-six and a half Tolstoy had received the central impulse of his spiritual teaching which he was to reassert definitely in *My Confession* in 1879, twenty-four years later. But his "incredibly full consciousness of life," fortunately for humanity, was first to find its full exercise and expression in literature, and in an insatiable curiosity to sound Russian

[1] Translation by A. Maude.

life to its depths, as well as to overflow in personal ambitions, philanthropic aims, and practical well-doing. The capture of Sebastopol, in August, 1855, soon ended the war, and Tolstoy was ordered to St. Petersburg with despatches. Birukoff asserts that Tolstoy's skit, *The Sebastopol Song*, on the Russian generals was "the obstacle" to his further military career. He received no promotion, and was snubbed by his commanding officers. But his resignation, which occurred in November, 1856, would have been anyway merely a matter of time. His home letters, both from the Caucasus and Silistria, and the Crimea, 1851–5, of course contain passages full of patriotic ardour, as well as of the ambition natural to any spirited young officer, but Tolstoy himself never idealised his own motives.[1] As he said himself, many years later, of *Sebastopol Tales:* "One feels that the author knows there is a law of God: love thy neighbour and therefore do not kill him."

[1] "... I petitioned to be sent to Kichinev, in the Crimea, partly to get away from Serzhpoutov's staff, which I disliked, but still more from patriotic feeling which I own then overcame me."—*Tolstoi par Tolstoi*, p. 144.

II

TURGENEV—TRAVEL—EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENTS

In the years 1856–61, Tolstoy wrote five of his best tales, and finished his novel *The Cossacks* in 1862. A few words are necessary on the political situation in Russia at this date. The long reign of Nicolas I—a cold, despotic martinet—had been one of iron repression. The progressive spirits were banished, executed, imprisoned, or suppressed.[1] The accession of Alexander II—an amiable but changeable temperament—marked the outrush of the long-fermenting Liberal ideas, and a general social expansion, which took form in the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. The political atmosphere for the next ten years was milder and freer than perhaps at any other period of Russian history, but, as before, the work of the leading writers retained enormous influence over the mind of educated Russia—an influence far greater than European authors have exercised in their own countries. In Druzhinin's phrase,

[1] See the long list cited by Brückner in *A Literary History of Russia.*

a few men, such as Turgenev and Tolstoy, became "the voice of a new mind for the whole Empire." On his arrival in Petersburg in November, 1855, Tolstoy was eagerly welcomed by the leading authors, Fet, Turgenev, Nekrassov, Grigorovitch, etc., then attached to *The Contemporary*, the chief Liberal review. But Tolstoy, though intimate with the circle, was indifferent or hostile to its ideas, and took a sarcastic and indeed a diabolic pleasure in exasperating Turgenev, the most generous and lovable of men, by expressing his doubts as to the latter's sincerity, and often showing contempt for his works. A volume might be written on the complicated personal relations of the two geniuses, but, briefly, Tolstoy, breathing youthful arrogance and creative power, morally dissatisfied with himself and everyone round him, long discharged all his harsh, aggressive pride and penetrating sarcasm on the head of Turgenev, who both fascinated and repelled him.[1] Finally, in May, 1861, the

[1] "Turgenev tried to avoid Tolstoy, and with this object went to Moscow, then went to his country place, but Tolstoy followed him step by step 'like a woman in love.'" Garshin's *Reminiscences.*

latter, stung to madness by Tolstoy's provocation, was led into a violent quarrel and was challenged by Tolstoy to a duel: Turgenev apologised, and later Tolstoy "asked forgiveness and renounced his challenge" in turn.[1] In these years, 1856–61, Tolstoy plunged deep into every kind of action and interest and tasted every distraction that allured him. He strove after "personal happiness," "kept a splendid table, had an excellent lodging, associated with loose women, and received my friends handsomely."[2] But we must not imagine that the moralist in him was in any sense less busy. Thus, a few months after the dissipations of card playing, literary dinners, carousals, etc., in which Tolstoy indulged in St. Petersburg, 1856, he fell in love with a young lady of aristocratic family; but he soon commences to lecture her on her passion for balls and flirtations, preaches to her in a lengthy

[1] Tolstoy's criticisms of Turgenev's works in his letters to Fet show an inveterate and irritated bias against Turgenev's outlook and personality. Immediately after Turgenev's death Tolstoy's opinion changed entirely. He writes, October 1883, "I love him terribly."

[2] *My Confession.*

correspondence his high ideals of family life and moral self-development. Finally, Tolstoy confesses that he has no real love for her, but has "been drawn into tasting the evil pleasure of inspiring love," asks pardon of God, and to extricate himself leaves Russia for a foreign tour. In fact, Tolstoy's conduct here, as ever, shows a series of oscillations between the antipathetic poles of the attractions of the senses and the call of spiritual duties.

On his travels abroad in 1857, to Paris, Dijon, Switzerland, and the Rhine, Tolstoy came into conflict with "the dull, respectable English," and records in his story, *Lucerne*, the incident of the wandering singer, Albert, who was repulsed by the rich visitors at the Schweizerhof hotel. With characteristic, humane indignation Tolstoy brought the humble wanderer back to the hotel and sat down with him to a meal, to the scandal of the well-dressed tourists! Although Tolstoy was keenly interested by his continental impressions he already begins to express his scepticism as to "Progress" and "Civilisation" making men happier or better. He sees an execu-

tion in Paris and notes : " A stout, white, healthy neck and breast : he kissed the Gospel and then—death. What a senseless thing." He is impressed by the beauty of the Savoy lakes and mountains, but is left cold by them. " I like Nature when it enfolds me on all sides . . . when I am myself in it. . . . I do not like what are called glorious and magnificent views." He rises to a height of philosophic calm which he was to attain again, years later, in the Epilogue to *War and Peace.* " What an unfortunate being is man with his need of positive solutions, cast into the eternally moving, endless ocean of good and evil, of facts, of reflections, and contradictions ! Men have been struggling and labouring for ages to put the good all on one side, and the evil on the other. Ages pass and no matter what the unprejudiced mind may have added to the scales of good and evil, there is always the same equilibrium, and on each side there is just as much good as evil." When approaching his thirtieth year, when his physical powers were at their highest, a certain equilibrium between Tolstoy's social, moral, and artistic

activities would seem to have been maintained, each asserting itself and being kept in check by the others. On his return to Russia, early in 1858, we find him looking after his estate, Yasnaya Polyana, engaging in shooting, hunting, balls, social visits to his family and neighbours, public affairs, studying the peasants' life, and organising village schools. In connection with this latter work, which, in the winter of 1859–60, occupied his serious attention, Tolstoy again went abroad (1860)[1] to study foreign educational methods, and devoted many weeks to a penetrating examination of German teaching. What he saw of German zeal for discipline, love of theory, belief in automatic or formal rules and regulations, and the whole science of German pedagogy confirmed him in his innate and increasing belief that the imposition of compulsory education on the people does not correspond to the latter's real needs. When a little later he organised the village school at Yasnaya Polyana, and himself took charge, he developed an entirely revolu-

[1] In the September of this year Tolstoy's brother Nicolai died at Hyères in his arms. See page 56.

tionary method of teaching; doing away with all set, compulsory lessons, "orders," rewards and punishments, "as well as with all instruction" in grammar, history, and geography. The children came when they liked and sat where they liked, listening or not, as it pleased them, the teacher exercising authority by his calmness, mild magnetism, and skill in evoking and holding their attention by the pure interest of his instruction. Whereas the ordinary teacher struggles against the current of his pupils' inclinations, imposing his will as to what they should learn, Tolstoy sought only to excite their human interest, to stimulate their curiosity in life, art, nature, and literature, and to lead them "to fall in love with the book, with learning, and with me." The idea of "compulsion" was exchanged for "freedom," and Tolstoy's educational experiment, which was abandoned a year later, 1862, through ill-health, overwork, and the claims of married life, was a first and complete putting into practice of his theory of "non-compulsion" of the individual by Society. It was also a reversal of the theory

and practice of the Liberal political reformers, throughout Europe, which then, as now, dictated an attenuated middle-class curriculum for both peasants and proletariat. "Book-learning" was, and still is, the pedagogic official ideal, and it is difficult to say whether the cramming of a child with a selection of dry facts is not as injurious to its mind as feeding it on shop bread and tea is to its body. With his powerful insight Tolstoy went to the root of the whole question in declaring "*all instruction should be simply a reply to questions put by life. But School, far from evoking questions, fails even to answer those which life suggests.*" It is clear that, in the hands of ardent teachers, such an education would soon lead to a teaching of social ethics which might question the utility and foundations of the modern Capitalistic State, and it is not surprising that during Tolstoy's absence in Samara, in June, 1862, where he was taking a Koumiss cure, the police authorities suddenly arrived and ransacked his house and the school at Yasnaya, breaking open cupboards and drawers, and tearing up

floors in search of revolutionary documents. Of course there was nothing to find, but the public affront put on Tolstoy, the commotion caused among the peasants, and the arrest of teachers in neighbouring schools working on Tolstoy's plan, so disgusted him that he declared "all the activity in which I found happiness and peace is spoiled. . . . I have no other choice than either to receive satisfaction as public as the insult, or else to expatriate myself, upon which I have firmly decided. . . . I will loudly announce that I am selling my estate and mean to leave Russia. . . ." Though Tolstoy's unorthodoxy brought him repeatedly into conflict with the Bureaucracy and the Censorship his position as an aristocrat and a famous writer, now, as always, secured him immunity from serious persecution. The Minister of Education definitely refused, at the Minister of the Interior's instigation, to suppress the educational magazine, *Yasnaya Polyana;* but Tolstoy, who had married Miss Sophia Behrs, September, 1862, was now tired of the growing worries of school management, just as he had

grown sick, six months before, of the incessant disputes with the local landowners into which his official post of Arbiter of the Peace had plunged him. According to Birukoff,[1] Tolstoy, as an arbitrator, was "a true champion of the peasant against the harsh tyranny of the landowners and police officers," and his decisions against the subterfuges of "a whole party of serf-owners who firmly stuck to their old customs and privileges" being set aside by the Provincial Court, he was forced to resign his duties, April 1, 1862, under the pretext of bad health. Mr. Maude draws attention[2] to the fact that the story of Tolstoy's life can be told "with so little reference to the Emancipation or the Reform movements of the year 1860–4," and Tolstoy's own remark, at a public dinner at Toula, "it is to the Emperor alone that we owe the Emancipation," shows his temperamental lack of sympathy with the programme of the Liberal reformers. Many years later, in *My Confession*, Tolstoy declared that while

[1] *Leo Tolstoy*, Vol. I, pp. 309–11.
[2] *Life of Tolstoy*, Vol I, pp. 223–5.

the excited condition of Russian Society over the Emancipation awoke in him, as ever, a feeling of sceptical opposition, his own reforming energy "proceeded from my own personal inner motives." In fact, the reformer and moralist had had an overlong innings for two years. "With my duties as arbitrator, with the schools, and with my newspaper—I was harassed to death. . . . I fell ill more with mental than physical sickness, gave up everything, and started for the Steppes to breathe a fresher air . . . and live a mere animal life."[1]

We must now speak of the artistic fruit, the five chief stories, of the period 1856–61, and *The Cossacks*, the novel, completed 1862.

[1] *My Confession.*

III

EARLY STORIES—"THE COSSACKS"

BREADTH, depth, and intensity are the dominant characteristics of Tolstoy's art. And the feeling of the unresting tide of humanity that emanates from his novels and tales is due in great part to his consciousness always being mindful of the inexhaustible ocean of peasant life. While Tolstoy's sympathies were to rest finally with the peasants, for once in a way, in *A Squire's Morning* (1852), he directed his reforming zeal against their vices, their slackness, fatalism, and distrust of modern methods. The tale is admirable in its character-drawing, but is valuable, as is *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*, rather for its autobiographical data than as a piece of art. The latter, which contains some exquisite passages of poetic description, is the most remorseless scrutiny of the affectation and self-consciousness of youth and youth's sentimentalism; and

already in this first work (1852–4), which brought the author fame, he is seeking the why and wherefore of life, searching for the good under the veils of worldly pretences. Far superior are the stories, *The Snowstorm* (1856) and *Polikushka* (1860), when Tolstoy records with delight the characteristic behaviour of peasant types. *The Snowstorm*, a description of a night spent while travelling in a blizzard on the Don steppes, is extraordinarily fresh in its actuality. The team-drivers, Ignashka and Mitrich, the panting, sweating horses, the dreams of the half-frozen narrator in the sledge, all are as vividly stamped on the mind as yesterday's sensations. *Polikushka* did not please Tolstoy in later years, precisely because it is devoid of moral aim. In it the balance is held fair between the rich, fussy, kind-hearted old lady and the hero, the weak, thieving lad, Polikey, the family house serf and father of five little children, whom the bailiff wishes to send away as a conscript. His mistress intervenes, however, and despatches poor Polikey to the neighbouring town, on a mission of trust, to bring back 1500 paper

roubles. On his way back Polikey loses from his cap the envelope containing the bank-notes, and after hunting for it along the road, hangs himself in despair in the loft. The story, in its wealth of exact observation and insight into peasant manners and the peasant mind, is a perfect gold mine. No less triumphant in its objective force is *Two Hussars* (1856), the only short story in which Tolstoy does full justice to the free-handed, reckless, pleasure-loving man of the world, here personified in Count Turbin, "a true hussar at heart," who after rescuing the cornet, Ilyin, from the clutches of a Greek card-sharper, makes a conquest of the charming little widow, Anna Fyodorovna, at the provincial ball, and drives away next morning from the town of K—— accompanied by singing gipsy girls and drunken gipsies. In its brilliance and verve Part I is as captivating as a scherzo by Mozart, and in Part II which recounts how, twenty years after, Count Turbin's son, a mean and paltry worldling, seeks to seduce Anna Fyodorovna's daughter, the stream of the narrative deepens, with its

contemplative, twilight atmosphere and leisurely analysis of human motive. But brilliant and charming as is the story *The Two Hussars*, it is surpassed by *Three Deaths* (1858), profound in its human breadth and poetic force. The story, one of the greatest in any language, is marvellous in its revelation of the tragic gulf yawning between the living and the dying, and in the sense of the inexorable laws of growth and decay in nature. How simple, yet how all-embracing is the poetic scheme. Two carriages containing a consumptive lady, her maid, and her husband, and a doctor stop at a posting station, where the young driver, Fedya, begs a pair of new boots from a peasant sick unto death. In the spring, the lady dies at her grand town house, and at the posting station Fedya, reproached for not having yet bought a stone to mark the dead peasant's grave, goes into the forest and fells an aspen, out of which he fashions a cross. Here Tolstoy's impartial, all-comprehending thought accepts the meaning of death in Nature's scheme, the birth and passing away into nothingness of each little atom of

life, whether it be a man, or the corn sprouting in the fields, or the tree felled in the forest. Only a great poet could have conveyed with such profundity, with such calm loftiness of mood, yet with living warmth of detail, the austerely merciful law of death. *Three Deaths* is poetic realism of the highest order, a classic in this rare *genre*. In *Family Happiness* (1859) the same deep mood of poetic understanding concerns itself with a study of the birth, efflorescence, the waxing and waning of passion in a typical marriage, between a young, ardent girl and a serious, middle-aged man. Though the story is exquisite in its tender, spiritual charm, and is nigh perfect in its masterly analysis of love's early, intoxicating happiness, and of the slowly widening breach between Sergey Mihalovitch and his young wife who longs for the excitement and amusements of Society, and not for the monotonous, secluded country life which contents her husband, over it hangs the shadow of the moralist's desire to convince us of the fleetingness of romantic passion. The form, a narrative told by Macha herself,

is a little cramping and unnatural, but the psychological sequence of events, the husband's growing jealousy of his wife's social pleasures, her innocent flirtations with other men, the rupture, the man's cold repression of his feeling, the numbness and hollow heartache of the woman who tries, too late, to reawaken the tender fervour and confidence of their former passion, all this is presented with consummate art. M. Romain Rolland declares that in *Family Happiness* "for once the analysis of the writer is deprived of its cruder lights; it has the perfection of a work of Racine . . . the story passes in the heart of a woman, and is told by her; and with what exquisite delicacy, what spiritual beauty! the beauty of a soul withdrawn behind a veil of truest modesty." But in truth the story is marred by the slight intrusion of Tolstoy's own sentiments towards the close. He desires too plainly there shall come to pass this "august passage from love to friendship and the romance of the passion of maternity," and here, passing to the short novel, *The Cossacks* (1863), we must note the

same defect prevailing more obtrusively. Turgenev was right when he declared, "to contrast civilization with fresh, primeval Nature, there was no need again to produce that dull, unhealthy fellow (the hero Olenin), always preoccupied with himself. Why does Tolstoy not get rid of that nightmare?" Tolstoy had projected the novel in 1852, written it in 1860, and retouched it in 1862, before its appearance in Katkof's *Russian Messenger*. The hero, the young officer Olenin, is himself, and the narrative of the former's life in the wild Cossack village, and his passion for the beautiful Cossack girl, Mariana, who looked on him with calm, proud, and gay indifference, and of his longing to lose his civilized consciousness and "taste life in all its artless beauty" is autobiographical. The descriptions of the wild, mountainous landscape, of the river Terek, of the crafty "child of nature," Uncle Yeroshka, of the handsome young brave, Lukashka, of the Cossacks' shooting expeditions, of the fight with the Tchetchenian "abréks," all this is presented with incomparable freshness and vigour. Many passages celebrate

with pantheistic ardour this fermentation in the soul of a youth thirsting for love and adventure, and overflowing with ecstatic communion with the richness and beauty of creation. But there is something undeniably tiresome in the contrast drawn between the mercenary self-seeking of the Cossack braves and Mariana, and the self-consciousness and spiritual philosophising of Olenin. We become irritated by this Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, who is finally recalled by his duties to the artificial and worldly life of St. Petersburg and Moscow, and our sympathies remain with the primitive people, who, with all their unscrupulousness and cunning, know how to abandon themselves to life, unlike the young officer hero, "preoccupied with himself." The triumph of the story lies in the picture of Uncle Yeroshka, an incarnation of the God Pan, who loved the animals of the forest that he hunted, and derided the preachers. "What, to love a beautiful girl, a sin! No. God has created her to be admired, to be loved, and to give us joy! . . . After our death the grass will grow on our grave. That is all."

IV

MARRIAGE—"WAR AND PEACE"

In his account of Tolstoy's characteristics Birukoff lays stress on his "extraordinary capacity for being passionately carried away by anything brought within his sphere. Whether that happened to be hunting or card-playing, music or reading, school teaching or farming, he exhausted to the very utmost each set of his impressions." After exhausting himself in a passionate or fanatical exposition of his field of "moral perfecting," a swift mental reaction followed, and the Count would appear sunny, gay, or sweet in mood, a polished man of the world, responsive to social pleasure. The account given by Sergeyenko,[1] while explaining the duality

[1] "Lyoff Nikolaevitch . . . was no longer the same man as in the study. Charm and mirth seemed to have fallen from him, and it even seemed as though he had grown somewhat older. When he is fatigued or dis-

of his nature, should guard us against paying too great attention to any inconsistency in his actions or ideas. It was Tolstoy's extraordinary richness of nature and manysidedness that, like a great river overflowing its banks, fertilised whole provinces of human feeling. His rigid disciples, such as Tchertkov, would have pent the great stream between the straitened banks of moral endeavour, but in vain! the embankment was broken through again and again by the force of his passionate curiosity and zest in life.[1] At the same time it is true that the older Tolstoy grew the clearer is it seen that

pleased with anything, his cheeks sink in and his face assumes a rather gloomy character."—Sergeyenko, p. 10.

"And as I looked at that delicate and well-bred man from whose every word shone forth sensitiveness, it was difficult to imagine him as the vehement protester, lying with inflated nostrils on the divan, and unwilling to yield so much as an iota to one of the most inoffensive men in the world."—*Idem*, p. 19.

[1] In a most important letter to the Countess A. Tolstoy, in 1863, Tolstoy explains that he is quite a different man from what he was a year back. "I am now a writer with all the forces of my being. I write and meditate as I never did before. . . . I don't understand how I could have loved people so much"; and two years later he tells her, "I am not interested in knowing who is oppressing the Poles. . . . The butcher kills the ox we eat, and I can't be constrained to blame him, or express any sympathy."—*Tolstoi par Tolstoi*, pp. 275, 289.

his manysided activities were as spokes in a wheel, all radiating from the hub of his central spiritual aims—a passionate pursuit of the Truth, a passionate probing of human motives, a passionate zeal for "moral perfecting," and later still, a passionate desire for men's union by love.

The middle period (1862–76) was the calmest and the happiest in Tolstoy's life, and the most important and prolific in literary composition. In the duties and pleasures of family life, in the management of his country estates, and in the composition of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenin* he now found broad and normal channels for the expression of his vast energy. In marrying Sophia Behrs, the daughter of an old family friend, Tolstoy was guided by happy foresight rather than by romantic love.[1] Tolstoy was thirty-four, his wife eighteen, and while in happy domesticity he found a haven from the temptations of the passions, his wife is

[1] Although with characteristic impetuosity Tolstoy threatened to shoot himself if his suit was not accepted. He writes to Fet, October 9, 1862: "It is fifteen days since my marriage and I am a new man, absolutely new." For the story of his betrothal, see Halperine—Kaminsky's *Tolstoi par Tolstoi*, pp. 240–70.

held to have exorcised for long years his moods of religious austerity and gloomy depression.[1] Countess Tolstoy is generally praised by Tolstoy's biographers as "a valuable helpmate, a prudent manager, a devoted wife," and the growing rift between husband and wife in the last stages of their union, owing to her success in preventing Tolstoy from giving up his worldly possessions and disinheriting his children, was quite inevitable from each of their standpoints of "duty." The subject of this rift between Tolstoy and his wife and family can be studied in his posthumous play, *The Light that Shines in Darkness.* We deal briefly with it on page 95.

Soon after marrying, Tolstoy embarked on his epic novel, *War and Peace* (first part issued 1864, completed 1869). Sergeyenko tells us Tolstoy's original intention was to write a story on "The Decembrists" —the aristocratic revolutionists of 1825— but in his researches he was led back to the preceding epoch (1805–12). By his study of State records, historical archives, and

[1] R. Rolland's *Tolstoy*, p. 83 (English translation).

private memoirs of the period he laid the foundations deep,[1] while from the family papers, traditions, and anecdotes of both the Tolstoys and the Volkonskys he derived many of the striking episodes and incidents of the novel. The colossal structure is built round the family fortunes of two aristocratic households, the Rostovs and the Bolkhonskys, whose private lives are interwoven with the chain of historical events.[2] Thus, in the experiences of Nicholas Rostov and Prince Andrei Bolkhonsky with their regiments, we witness the great drama of the Campaign of Austerlitz and along with Dolohov and Petia Rostov we follow the French retreat from Moscow. The creative force and richness of *War and Peace* is due to the transmutation, in the crucible of the novelist's titanic imagination, of an inexhaustible store of personal memories, observations, and experiences, fused with

[1] For example, in his description of the battles of Austerlitz, Schongraben, and Borodino, Tolstoy discusses the versions of the French and Russian military historians, and criticises the generals' tactics.

[2] The gentle, religious-minded Princess Marya is a portrait of his mother; the old Count Rostov of his father; Dolohov of a distant cousin, Theodore Tolstoy, etc.

the records and narratives of personal eye-witnesses of the historical events of the period 1805–13. Thus in Part X, chapters III.–X., the description of the old Prince Bolkhonsky's senility and death, of the steward Alpatitch's mission, the bombardment and abandonment of Smolensk, of the neglected state of the Bleak Hill estates and the attitude of the peasants of Bogutcharavo, are obviously largely composed of Tolstoy's own impressions, cast in fictitious circumstances, and historically coloured; whereas most of the scenes in which Napoleon and the French figure are thinner in texture, inferior in atmospheric richness and artistic actuality. The epical scheme that Tolstoy adopted, one marvellously flexible, enabled him to bring into play all his artistic and mental powers—his first-hand knowledge of military and official and land-owning life, his satire of worldly motives, his great experience of men and manners, his love of nature, his philosophic analysis of history. There is nothing indeed in modern literature to compare with *War and Peace* in breadth and universality. Inferior to *The Iliad* in

concentration and beauty, it is superior to it in the range and complexity of its human interests ; and while presenting no poetic creations of types to equal the Achilles, the Hector, the Ulysses, or the Agamemnon of Homer, it rivals it in portraying a gallery of ordinary men and women, in a few broad, sharp, deeply graven strokes. We must except, however, the figure of Kutusov, a truly national figure, by whom Tolstoy symbolises all the qualities that have made Russia great. Kutusov is truly a Homeric figure. The field of human life explored in *War and Peace* is alike vaster and more detailed than in the Greek epic, contrasting as it does the Court circles and ministers of Alexander I, the upper classes of Moscow and Petersburg, the home-life of the provincial nobility and their retainers and house-serfs, against a great background of peasant-life, with the campaigns of two great armies and the battlefields of the Napoleonic invasion. All is actuality, movement, character in their shifting sea of national activity, while the current of events is seen bearing the generation irresistibly forward to fresh

actions and new relations, and swirling onwards to changing horizons; and the relation of each little particle of human individuality to the vast tide of social activities is shown in its inevitable, right perspective. The chief artistic blot in the scheme is that the figure of Pierre Bezuhov, and the narrative of his moral difficulties, doubts, and self-questionings are too modern in tone, and out of harmony with the historical atmosphere. Merezhkovsky, indeed, following Turgenev, objects that Tolstoy has not attempted to catch the spirit of the epoch, 1807–13, and that the manners and historical colouring of the novel are not really authentic. This is partly true: Tolstoy has boldly disregarded the particular *fashions* of the decade, but this is an artistic strength, since the human depth and freshness of feeling of *War and Peace* are rendered thereby with more naturalness and creative freedom. More to the point is Flaubert's complaint that Tolstoy philosophises excessively towards the close, and that his doctrine of the fatality of history is overdone and wearisome. But here again the

effect is of a stormy sea thundering still upon a beach long after the wind has dropped. And we may add that no other great European writer has presented or elaborated this particular doctrine; that it springs from the deep roots of the Russian people's fatalism; and that it forms the brooding grandeur of the epical background. Tolstoy never returned to the subject of the Decembrists, he tells us, because "I did not find therein what I sought, that is to say, what is of general interest to mankind";[1] and later, after working for a considerable period on an historical romance, *Peter the Great*, Tolstoy also abandoned it for good. "My study of the original sources entirely altered my view of Peter I. He lost his former interest for me,"[2] he declared. Peter's achievements in national policy and in material reforms would indeed have been presented as antipathetically as are Napoleon's military ambitions and statecraft in *War and Peace*. It has not been

[1] *How Count Tolstoy Lives and Works*, by Sergeyenko, p. 11.
[2] Sergeyenko, p. 12.

sufficiently remarked that the field of action is so enormous in *War and Peace*, and the conflicting moods and emotions of the host of types are so multifarious as to counterbalance by their volume and variety the author's occasional ethical emphasis. Again, the limitations or weaknesses of the good, aspiring characters, such as of the Princess Marya and Pierre Bezuhov, are as clearly brought to light as the sensuality and frivolity of his wife Ellen, the naïve, obsequious snobbery of Berg, the irresponsibility of Anatole Kuragin, the handsome and shallow seducer, the elegant worldliness of Boris, the cynical opportunism of the typical courtier, Prince Vassily. Tolstoy sides with nobody in particular, except Pierre Bezuhov and Prince Andrei, and these two characters successively mirroring the human goodness and religious idealism of Tolstoy's heart, and the philosophical questionings of his intellect, are so cleverly individualised and contrasted as to conceal their functions as mouthpieces. Again, the artistic freshness and richness of the novel springs not a little from the effective

balance maintained between the exquisite domestic pictures (for example, that of Natasha's whims and Nickolai's feeling for Sonya, in Part VII, chapters IX.–X.); the satire on worldly frivolity and callousness (Part I, chapters I.–X.); the descriptions of open-air nature (example, the wolf-hunt in Part VII, chapter III.); and the extraordinary richness and animation, now brilliant, now mournful, now terrible, of the scenes on campaign, as the description of the horrors of the French military hospital, or the opening scenes of the battle of Austerlitz.

Kropotkin is probably right in declaring that the correctness of Tolstoy's "philosophy of war," though bitterly criticised, cannot but be recognised and is recognised by those who "know war from within." Kutusov, the aged Russian Commander-in-Chief, whose caution and experience lead him to accept the march of events, while safeguarding his army so far as possible, symbolises the true Russian's power of endurance and reserve force. It may be noted that neither the glorification of Russian fatalism nor the exposition of

Napoleon's powerlessness to guide or control his invading hordes—though in the character of leader he does and says everything appropriate to sustain his prestige for infallibility—make for artistic weakness. The psychological exposition may be overloaded, but like a Rembrandt portrait in its bold chiaroscuro, it concentrates the rays of light with telling intensity.

Alike in majesty and depth of effect, in sweep of the epic brush, in range of emotional inflections, in the historian's insight into character and motive, in fertility and natural sequence of events, *War and Peace* is far the greatest novel in history. Nothing in European literature, from Cervantes onwards, approaches it for sustained power in the delineation of the human drama, though in subtlety of artistic effect, and in pure originality and in beauty Tolstoy is surpassed by many of his rivals.

V

"ANNA KARENIN"

AFTER the completion of *War and Peace* Tolstoy developed a violent enthusiasm for Schopenhauer's works,[1] and meditated translating them, an enthusiasm which was soon followed by great interest in the drama of Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe, varied with lazy fits and spells of outdoor pursuits and athletics. His interest in his children's education and the management of his estates (he purchased a large estate in Samara, 1871) was maintained, but he soon threw himself with intense ardour into mastering Greek, reading Herodotus and "delightful Xenophon" at sight, after a few months, and studying Homer with a dictionary. "Without a knowledge of Greek there is no education," he writes to Fet. But overdoing his studies he went to

[1] "He has given me such moral joys as I have never before known."

Samara for a Koumiss cure, living in a Bashkir village, adopting an animal diet, wandering on the Steppes, conversing with members of the Sect of the Milk Drinkers, and captivating his new acquaintances by his zest and high spirits. "The Bashkirs smell of Herodotus," he writes. Early in 1872, Tolstoy made a break back to his old educational schemes for the benefit of the peasants' children, compiling an ABC primer for beginners, writing several stories for it, including *A Prisoner in the Caucasus*, adapting and translating popular fables from many sources, and restarting his village school. His preliminary sketches and studies for a novel of the time of Peter the Great (September, 1872) came to nothing, and in March he commenced *Anna Karenin*, a labour interrupted by another visit to Samara, where Mr. Maude tells us "nine-tenths of the population were suffering acutely from the failure of three successive harvests." Tolstoy investigated the people's condition, and drew up an appeal which, printed in *The Moscow Gazette*, produced a fund of two million roubles. Family

troubles, the ill-health of his wife, and the death of his aunt Tatiana and two of his young children, in 1873–5, as well as the impediments placed in the path of his educational projects, would seem to have cast a shadow over Tolstoy's mind at this period. By August, 1875, after another visit to Samara, he was tiring of "dull, commonplace *Anna Karenin*," as he styles it to Fet, and in April, 1876, he writes to the latter, "You are ill and you think of death, and I am well and I too do not stop thinking about it and preparing for it." The Servian-Turkish war broke out in July, and Tolstoy's hostility to the war-fever in Russia, which culminated a year later in the Russo-Turkish war, is indicated in the last chapters of *Anna Karenin*, chapters which Katkoff, the all-powerful Slavophile journalist, refused to serialise in *The Russian Messenger*.

In *Anna Karenin* Tolstoy's realism attains its climax in extraordinary fulness and delicacy of perceptions of a social environment, along with an unerring synthesis of the secrets of consciousness,—a realism which conveys the force and

solidity of physical life with the finest impressionistic subtlety. To read the novel is like focussing a powerful binocular on scenes passing at short range: every detail of form in the whole dramatic spectacle is shown in its changing colour and living movement. Yet this complete illusion of human life is secured clearly and harmoniously. The marvellous intimacy of Tolstoy's understanding of men's natures, and the wealth amassed of exact observation, endow his drama of Moscow and Petersburg aristocratic circles with an amazing diversity of temperamental contrasts. By artfully contrasting the special atmospheres of four upper-class households, the Karenins, the Shtcherbatskys, the Oblonskys, the Levins, with brilliant etchings of fashionable life in the *salons*, the racecourse, officers' quarters, the clubs, the ballroom, foreign watering-places, etc., Tolstoy catches the breath of outlook and the flexibility of upper-class social intercourse in an unrivalled degree. The flow and passage of events, the rhythm of daily habit, broken by moments of crisis, the direction of activities into the

widening channels of new plans, changing hopes, fresh interests, the coming together, fusion, and drifting away of friends and acquaintances—all this is shown with unparalleled naturalness and subtlety. "It is life itself," as Mr. W. D. Howells says. Of the men characters, three, Stepan, the good-humoured, lovable bon-vivant, Karenin the high official, whose pedantic dryness of naturea and starchy awkwardness make him revolting to his wife, the brilliant and charming Anna, when contrasted with the passion of Vronsky the handsome, polished officer, these three types of men are marvellously portrayed in every inflection of their thought and bearing. Of the women, Dolly, the sweet, devoted mother, faded by her domestic worries and her husband's (Stepan's) infidelities, Kitty Shtcherbatsky, the fresh young girl who marries Levin, and Anna Karenin herself, exquisitely natural in her sensitive grace and high-bred beauty, we may say with Meredith, that "Anna is the most perfectly defined female character in all fiction." Tolstoy, unlike Turgenev, does not individualise his women highly, but

intensely interested in the feminine soul, he penetrates woman's most secret emotions as wife, or mistress, or mother, and shows her not as she appears to men but as she is in herself, and as she is seen by her intimate women friends. The intimacy of Tolstoy's perceptions of every kind of physical state and nervous instinct is truly extraordinary, and his impressionistic veracity in describing the interaction of sense and spirit is unsurpassable. Compare the contrast of the dog's and his master's emotions in the shooting scene, Vol. II, p. 177,[1] with that of the mare, Frou-Frou, and of Vronsky in the steeplechase scene, Vol. I, pp. 221–6. Also Anna's visit to Dolly, Vol. I, pp. 75–82, and Dolly's to Anna, Vol. II, pp. 198–207, and examine the sarcastic delineation of fashionable imbecility in the scene of Stepan's call on the Countess Lidia Ivanovna, Vol. II, pp. 331–6; Karenin's interview with the lawyer, on the matter of divorce, Vol. I, pp. 414–19; and the reconciliation of Karenin and Vronsky at

[1] *Anna Karenin.* Translated by Constance Garnett. 2 vols. Heinemann, 1901.

Anna's bedside, Vol. I, pp. 466–70. The emotional strain and the finest shades of inflection in character and manner, in such passages, are visualised by a succession of clear, direct touches, which convey a perfect illusion of the complexity of human feeling and animate nature, whether the scene pass in a hayfield or in a drawing-room. Yet, despite the emotional depth, social breadth and brilliant animation of *Anna Karenin*, there is a serious psychological flaw in the story which marks the bias of Tolstoy the moralist. The motto "Vengeance is Mine, I will Repay," which Tolstoy placed on the title-page, is meant to warn us against judging Anna, but few men will side with the moralists who wish to believe that her suicide was a natural consequence of her sin against her husband. Anna, after her separation from Karenin, is made to develop morbid and hysterical obsessions of causeless jealousy of Vronsky, and her irritated nerves and ceaseless exactions weary and torment her lover, who strives in vain to distract himself and her by other interests. Though Tolstoy has cleverly artificed the tragic ending,

there is no moral to be drawn from Anna's succumbing to her morbid nervous states, which may attack any woman, virtuous and chaste, and render her emotionally unstable. It is patent that Tolstoy's fear and distrust of sexual passion has deflected his artistic conscience, and the last portion of the story, which defines the hero Levin's search for a new religion, his irritation with the Slavophiles' patriotic programme, with the formulas of the scientists and the spiritualistic chatter of the drawing-rooms, are indeed a half-way house in Tolstoy's own spiritual development. The scenes of Levin's intercourse with the peasantry in the fields foreshadow his approaching definite condemnation of the whole basis of aristocratic life. Dostoevsky, with his usual acumen, remarked about this date, "In spite of his colossal artistic talent Tolstoy is one of those Russian minds which only see that which is right before their eyes and therefore press toward that point. Obviously they have not the power of turning their necks right or left to see what lies to one side: but they make the turn with their whole bodies. And then they

will perhaps maintain the direct opposite: for in any case they are strictly honest."

Tolstoy, after finishing *Anna Karenin*, again took up the subject of the Decembrists, but disenchanted with it, abandoned it for good. "That whole history has no roots in it," he declared later to Sergeyenko. A valuable glimpse into his mental state is offered in a letter to Fet, in April, 1898: "I am so indifferent to things of this life that life becomes uninteresting. . . . I hope you will love me though I be black." He enjoyed the summer, but Turgenev, in a letter, alludes to Tolstoy's "mental sickness," and the latter soon speaks of "living in (inner) fumes." It was the decisive revolt of his religious and ascetic side, which though often asserting itself had, from the moralist's point of view, been kept under by Tolstoy's immense range of worldly activities. What had he not tried and tasted in the most vigorous years of his manhood?—woman, love, nature, sport, travel, education, military and official life, politics, literature, art, philosophy, farming, marriage and family life. The cup of life, filled up so often, was now becoming tasteless.

VI

"MY CONFESSION"—"MY RELIGION"

THE last chapters of *Anna Karenin*, concerned with the hero Levin's "horror not so much of death as of life, without any knowledge of whence and why and how and what it was," are autobiographical. The recurring spasms of spiritual fear and bewilderment that Tolstoy had constantly recorded in his Diary now attacked him (1876–9) with redoubled force and brought him near to suicide. Though he tells us his physical powers were untouched, he had in fact just passed that period of high-tide in energy, when the slack waters turn and begin to drift on the ebb. He was sated with experience of life, literary success, and material prosperity. "I had no desires left," he tells us. Every thinking man who approaches fifty experiences this

baffling feeling of tedium and stagnation, but Tolstoy, who "exhausted to the very utmost each set of new impressions," was overwhelmed by his perception that all is vanity. He tells us in *My Confession:* "What I had lived by no longer existed; and I had nothing to live by. My life came to a standstill. . . . To-day or to-morrow sickness and death will come (they have come already) to those I love or to me; nothing will remain but stench and worms. . . . One can only live when one is intoxicated by life. . . . So I too clung to the twig of life, knowing that the dragon of death was inevitably awaiting me, ready to tear me to pieces . . . my love of family and of unity—art as I called it—were no longer sweet to me. . . . It was indeed terrible. And to rid myself of the terror I wished to kill myself. . . . The horror of darkness was too great, and I wished to free myself from it as quickly as possible by noose or bullet. . . ."[1]

One is reminded of Tolstoy's agony, many years before, when his brother, Nicolai, died in his arms, September 20,

[1] Translation by A. Maude.

1860, at Hyères.[1] Then, when Tolstoy was only thirty-two, his overflowing vitality bore him anew into the current of his passionate activities, but now (1877) the world of work and pleasure was stale. But resisting his suicidal impulses, he began to search for "the meaning of life" as revealed by religion. He found it " in the one and unmistakable manifestation of the Divinity, in the law of right and wrong which has come into the world by revelation . . . the conception of right which has been revealed to me as a Christian." In seeking the existence of God, he was overwhelmed with fresh despair as to his own relations with God, but he was finally saved from the black gulf by an inner voice saying, " God is Life. Live seeking God and then you will not be without God." But . . . " to save his soul a man must live 'godly'

[1] Tolstoy's letter to Fet : " One cannot laugh at a jest which wearies one. One cannot eat when one has no appetite. What avails anything when to-morrow will bring the agonies of death, with all the repulsiveness of falsehood and self-delusion, and when all ends in nothingness. . . . As soon as men reach the highest degree of development, they clearly see that all is stupidity and deceit ; and that truth, which they value most—that the truth is terrible. . . . Art is a lie, and I can no longer love a beautiful lie."—October 17, 1860.

and to live 'godly' *he must renounce all the pleasures of life.*" It was the old story (which he had known a hundred times before) of the ascetic moralist suppressing and crushing the natural sensuous man, and Tolstoy's case is parallel with St. Augustine's. The Church for a period was the refuge for his weary soul. But even as Tolstoy's senses, not to say his common sense, were to slip periodically free from the ascetic's leash, so his intellect soon made a rent in the theologians' nets. The fish was too big for the meshes of Orthodoxy. "I attended the services, knelt morning and evening in prayer, fasted and prepared to receive the eucharist . . . but nearly two-thirds of the whole service either remained quite incomprehensible, or, when I forced an explanation into them, *made me feel that I was lying, and thereby quite destroying my relation to God and losing all possibility of believing.*"

Tolstoy next details how, after three years' struggles, he became alienated from the Church by (*a*) its cruel and loveless attitude to heretics and other religious faiths, and (*b*) by its approving attitude

in regard to war and executions. Thus he was finally driven to examine for himself "the falsehoods and the truths contained in the holy tradition and the Scriptures," critical investigations which (1880–2) appeared as *Criticism of Dogmatic Theology* and *The Four Gospels Harmonised.* It was at this period, viz. 1880, that Turgenev, who had become reconciled to Tolstoy and had paid him a visit in 1878, again came to Yasnaya Polyana, and found him "plunged in mysticism . . . and surrounded with Bibles and Gospels in nearly all languages. . . . He has a trunk full of these mystical ethics. . . . Very probably he will give nothing more to literature or if he reappears it will be with that trunk."[1]

It was inevitable that Turgenev should deplore that the great artist was being swallowed up in the mystic (which had happened in Gogol's case); but Turgenev, who died three years later, could not foresee that Tolstoy the great humanitarian and moral teacher would become no less important to Europe than Tolstoy the great novelist. The evolution of Tolstoy's

[1] Maude's *Life of Tolstoy*, Vol. II, p. 19.

spiritual and ethical creed, never structurally perfected or architecturally harmonised, was to be retarded by fanatical deviations in the zealous search after "moral perfection" and by the very conscientiousness of his passion for spiritual truth. Thus, he actually took up the study of Hebrew in 1882! Just as he had spent years of labour in the composition of a *New Primer* (1872) and in learning Greek. Moreover, henceforward he was to be continually harassed by insuperable difficulties in reconciling his duty to God and his duty to his family. For the last thirty years of his life he was tormented spasmodically by his conscience, which reproached him for practising only in part what he preached. Indeed, critics who ought to know better, have lectured him on his moral failings.[1] For ourselves, we may rejoice that Tolstoy's titanic nature,

[1] "Instead of loving God through himself, and loving himself for the God in him, he hates himself, and refuses to recognise the gifts that God has given him. . . . And the cause of all this is spiritual pride, because he was unwilling 'to do his duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him,' etc."—*Landmarks in Russian Literature*, by Maurice Baring, p. 94. (A paraphrase from Merezhkovsky.)

ceaselessly at war with itself, was too mighty to lie at peace in any settled anchorage.[1] He progressed, so to say, in intersecting circles, being continually diverted by the appeal of fresh problems of social life, of moral discipline, of practical politics, of national, ethical, economic, and æsthetic difficulties in the conduct of life. But the centre of all these struggles with self and the world of sense and spirit was indeed simply the working out of "the new religion corresponding to the development of mankind" which he had defined in his Diary, on March 5, 1855, viz., "the religion of Jesus, but purified from dogma and mysticism, a practical religion, not promising bliss in future, but giving happiness on earth. . . . To work consciously for *the union of mankind* by religion. . . ." In *My Religion* (1884), as in other of his religious works, Tolstoy formulated five leading precepts from the Sermon on the Mount, as follows: (1) "Do not be angry." (2) "Do not lust." (3) "Do

[1] "This year I struggled long but the beauty of the world conquered me. I enjoy life and hardly do anything else."—Tolstoy to Fet, July 8, 1880. Quoted by A. Maude.

not bind yourself by oaths." (4) "Resist not him that is evil." (5) "Be good to the just and unjust." Pushed to the logical extreme these Christian precepts are in conflict with human nature's basis of egoism; and their rigorous practice has landed hundreds of fanatical Tolstoyans in disaster or death.[1] But the critic must guard himself from the temptation of assessing the value of Tolstoy's religious ideals by the test of their worldly practicability.[2] The influence of a great thinker cannot be measured, as English critics have tried to measure Rousseau, by the conformity of his creed with the laws of experience. Tolstoy's value as a moral

[1] Mr. Aylmer Maude, whose writings and intercourse both with Tolstoy and the members of various Tolstoyan communities endow his verdict with peculiar weight, charges Tolstoy with "setting up superstitions of his own in place of those he has overthrown." His superstitions are the "principles" of Non-Resistance, No-Government, No-Human-Law, and No-Property. A. Maude's *Life of Tolstoy*, Vol. II, p. 59.

[2] Another of his biographers, Dr. Charles Sarolea, has been even more extreme in his condemnation of Tolstoy's refusal to accept the State, to recognise Laws and Law-courts, property and money, to pay taxes and give military service. "That so gigantic a mind, with so lucid a vision of life and so firm a grasp of concrete reality, should have countenanced theories so manifestly absurd and so impracticable has remained to this day

teacher lies in other directions, as our following chapters seek to show.

an insoluble paradox. . . . It would be a thankless task to show how Tolstoy's feeble and erratic attempts to carry out his convictions led him to an endless succession of tortuous evasions and semi-comic, semi-pathetic self-contradictions. But he did not only land himself in failure—he sent out others to assume tasks which were doomed to end in disaster."—*Life of Count Tolstoy*, by Charles Sarolea, p. 292–6.

VII

"WHAT THEN MUST WE DO?"

In March, 1881, after Alexander II's assassination by the Nihilists, Tolstoy wrote an appeal to the young Tsar, begging him "to fulfil the law of Christ" and pardon the offenders. It is politic in tone, but its sentimental weakness clashes with its upper-class note of contempt for the Revolutionary party. Tolstoy was ill and weak at this period, and three months later the poet Polonsky, who met him at Turgenev's house, noted, "Tolstoy seemed to be reborn, imbued with a different faith and love." His own Diary speaks of his "weakness, indolence, and sadness," and of his feelings of moral shame when peasants, "tortured by overwork," passed his family when enjoying a sumptuous dinner. In January, 1882, Tolstoy, who had gone to reside in Moscow, issued a

fervent appeal for organised relief for the Moscow poor. His experiences, while census-taking in the slums, had horrified him and they soon convinced him that the economic basis of modern society is morally indefensible. In *What Then Must We Do?* (published in 1886) a thoroughgoing attack on *Property-holding*, the account of the stupidity of his former charitable ideas and of the absurdity of the fallen and degraded being taught to earn their bread by the rich and leisured who exist by exploiting labour, is crushing in its penetration. Here we may define the value of the whole series of Tolstoy's moral and ethical writings as a sustained attempt (*a*) to *awaken the conscience* of the Russian (and indirectly the European) educated class, and (*b*) to expose the lies, frauds, and contagious evils of our modern civilisation, and (*c*) to analyse the dogmas which our civilisation generates, wherever men gather together in coteries or masses, whether as the aristocratic caste, the commercial classes, democracy, militarists, or the Churches. Tolstoy's value as a teacher lies in what he *exposes*, not in what he

expounds. In *What Then Must We Do?* he exposes the exploitation of the peasant and the factory-worker by the rich, and sums up his indictment by proving that "the more money a man spends, the more work he obliges others to do for him: and the less he spends the more he works." The man with property, i.e. capital, need not work. "Property is the root of all evil. . . . States, Governments intrigue and go to war for property. . . . Bankers, traders, manufacturers, and landowners work, scheme, and torment themselves and others for property; officials and peasants struggle, cheat, oppress, and suffer for the sake of property; our law-courts and police defend property; and our penal settlements and prisons and all the horrors of our so-called repression of crime exist on account of property." "I see that by violence (i.e. our military and police system), extortion, and all kinds of tricks, in which I participate, necessaries are taken from the workers, while the non-workers (of whom I am one) consume in superfluities the fruits of the labour of those who toil." This, of course, is no new

discovery—all the great moralists in all ages and all the great idealists and satirists have launched their arrows at the same mark ; but it is Tolstoy's triumph to have stripped the fabric of our social egoism of the thick veils and wrappings with which the privileged class has disguised it in self-defence. Tolstoy's originality as a moral reformer consists in his remorseless logic, and in his inability to stop and hedge and compromise. He parts company entirely with the political reformer who, recognising the exploitation of labour by the upper-class and the capitalist, seeks to palliate it by enforcing legislative checks, and so, by practical sense of expediency, readjusts the machinery of social justice, and finds an equipoise of social pressure.

It is obvious that Tolstoy's doctrine of No-Property not only strikes at the whole fabric of modern civilisation, but is quite unworkable, save in a partial sense, in any community. Mr. Maude has detailed clearly and convincingly the failure of the Tolstoyan communities, not merely to maintain their existence, but to banish hatred and strife among their own mem-

bers.[1] His disciples who flocked to Yasnaya Polyana, abjured their old life, and sought to support themselves by manual labour, were either mere dilettanti, or came to a bad end, as Anna Seuron narrates. Perhaps the best illustration we could have of the unworkableness of the doctrine of Non-Resistance is that given by Mr. Maude in the history of the Schaveersky Colony, where a lad by stealing a waistcoat and pleading that since property is wrong, the owner had no more right to it than himself, upset the whole basis of co-operation between the members, and brought the No-Property, Non-Resistance, No-State doctrines tumbling to the ground.

We must, however, remember that though Tolstoy refused to serve on juries (1883), offered to make over all his property to his wife and children (1887), performed his own menial services, made boots, took to ploughing, sowing, carting manure, and wood-chopping for the

[1] "There was our own Tolstoy movement, with the loftiest possible aspirations, but a performance only efficient when we forgot our 'principles,' and at other times ludicrously and pathetically inefficient."—A. Maude, Vol. II, pp. 309–17 and 553, etc.

peasants (1885), finally renounced hunting, alcohol, and tobacco, denounced the use of money, and simplified his life generally, he never put his doctrines into practice *à outrance*. For this he was bitterly attacked and ridiculed by many, but his nature was too rich, vigorous, and generous, too broad-based and manysided, for the moral fanatic and religious enthusiast in him to impair radically the egoistic roots of his own instincts. Although his Christian Anarchist doctrines seek to transform the animal-egoistic basis of human existence into a basis of spiritual love and "moral perfection," Tolstoy, in his own practice, never stood the pyramid on its apex, to leave it remaining unsupported in the air! He was, we repeat, far too great. And putting aside the temporary and recurring attacks of asceticism and moral fanaticism that arose like storms in the depths of his being, we may assert that Tolstoy's spiritual nature was mainly preoccupied with two aims: (*a*) the pursuit of virtue, (*b*) with lessening social evil and human suffering. A true Russian, he was profoundly disinterested in the practical

organisation of society, and, indeed, instinctively detested all political and philanthropic poor-law schemes as fostering and helping to justify a system which he wished to destroy. At the same time we must guard ourselves from the error of thinking that Tolstoy's moral Utopianism lessened his goodness of heart and generosity and practical well-doing, whenever there was occasion. Not only was a considerable portion of his time and attention spent in relieving poverty and in helping the sick and necessitous who flocked to his door, but twice he organised Famine Relief; the second time in 1891, in Ryazan, on a very large scale.[1] The struggle between his warm and affectionate heart which

[1] Aylmer Maude recounts at length (Vol. II, p. 441) how for two years (1891) Tolstoy gave himself up to the work of feeding the starving peasants in the southern districts of Toula and Ryazan, opening eating-rooms for the children, distributing seed-corn, supplying horses, etc., till there were 246 eating-houses serving over ten thousand people; while Sergeyenko says: "By his own personal exertions Tolstoy founded more than two hundred soup kitchens, travelling to and fro over the snow-drifts, from village to village, through snowstorms and sapping cold. . . . With his inherent energy Tolstoy introduced many practical novelties into the enterprise which he organised, inspiring every one with his presence."—*How Count Tolstoy Lives and Works* (English Translation, p. 46).

constrained him to the service of his suffering fellows, and the religious idealist and moral doctrinaire, each of whom was profoundly dissatisfied with his philanthropic activity, is curiously shown in a letter Tolstoy wrote at this period. "I am living abominably. I don't know how I was trapped into this work of feeding the starving. . . . It is unsuitable for me to feed those by whom I myself am fed; but I have been dragged into it, and I find myself distributing the vomit of the rich. . . . The famine has all come about as a result of our sin in separating ourselves from our brothers and enslaving them: and there is only one way to save ourselves and mend matters: namely, by changing our lives, destroying the wall that separates us from the people, returning what we have taken from them and drawing nearer to them and blending with them, as a natural result of abandoning our privileges."[1] Tolstoy could only still his self-reproaches by the reflection that he was not feeding the starving peasants "for his own personal satisfaction"! Nothing could better show

[1] A. Maude, Vol. II, p. 434.

the strange rift in his nature which separated the natural man from the inaccessible peaks of spiritual aspiration to which the religious enthusiast was ever striving. Turgenev was right in asserting that Tolstoy's Christian Anarchism "ultimately leads to the most sombre denial of human life";[1] but, as said above, Tolstoy never himself took any "ultimate" step. Many times, in later years, he thought of retreating from the world and living a monastic life, but all the influences he underwent, even that of sectarian peasants such as Soutaef, and friends such as Stahof, not to speak of controversies with rival moral enthusiasts such as Frey, helped to keep him in the broad stream of incessant mental activities. The cynical governess, Anna Seuron's picture of Tolstoy's[2] protean nature must be quoted. "It happened at times that he threw off from himself Leo Tolstoy the writer, the count, the shoemaker, the aristocrat, and the father of a family and became simply himself—for he, like an onion, possesses the capacity to throw off one skin after another."

[1] A. Maude, Vol. II, p. 161. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

VIII

"THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYITCH"—"THE POWER OF DARKNESS"—"THE KREUTZER SONATA"

THE year 1886 was most important in Tolstoy's development, marking the re-emergence of the great artist, after ten years' silence. Although from the first a great innovator and illuminator in his searching analysis of life, Tolstoy must now be looked upon as a spiritual seer and ethical critic of humanity, expressing himself through art on the one side, and religious and social polemics on the other. *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch* (spring of 1886) was preceded and closely followed by the composition of tales and parables for the people (of which *Ivan the Fool* is the most spirited); and *The Power of Darkness*, written in the same year, perhaps the most power-

ful tragedy in all Russian literature, was composed during Tolstoy's convalescence after a painful and serious illness. In *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*, the artist, so to say, has come to an understanding with the moralist and is busily engaged in carrying out the theme, crushing in the sombre and terrifying light it throws on the futilities of a conventional life lapped in routine duties and lulled by trivial vanities and the comforts of worldly success. This sombre light cast on a typical upper-class bourgeois, as severe as that of Dante's *Inferno*, and as saturnine as a Zurbaran, is got by screening off the light, enjoyable rays of Ivan Ilyitch's existence, and showing us his figure and his past life in the deepening gloom of a waning, wintry day. Ivan Ilyitch, a typical official, walled in by his *comme-il-faut* ideas, unhappy in his conventional, loveless marriage, slips from a step-ladder one day in his elegant new apartments, and injures his side. Then comes sickness, consultations with fashionable doctors, all the jargon of medical examinations, and increasing pain and rapid wasting away. He is confined to his couch, and in his

agony of fear, he sees ahead of him only the blackness of his approaching death. And lying day after day in pain, clutching miserably at new remedies which do him no good, he sees that all the people round him, his wife and his family, are lying to him and keeping up a pretence, while all are secretly irritated by the trouble his illness causes them, and are only thinking of their own plans and pleasures and of themselves. The picture of the mental gulf between the healthy people at his bedside and the suffering man who goes over his past life and sees there was nothing in it but conventional correctness and a little sensual happiness and no real love for his fellows, and that " his life was a monstrous lie, concealing both life and death," is ferocious in its truth. The ascetic's disgust at the animal basis of human existence was gaining power over Tolstoy, who deliberately sought, in this year, to keep before himself " the consciousness of the nearness of death." The same puritanic, shuddering fear of the sinfulness of the flesh, of the slippery immoralities, deceits, and temptations that entrap the living, is displayed

with volcanic power, and inspires us with pity and horror in *The Power of Darkness*, a drama of peasant life. Here, again, both the great artist and the moralist have agreed to give each other a free hand, the former exulting in delineating both the pious folk and the sinners, chief of whom is the crafty, resourceful old woman, Matryona, who tempts the wife Anisya to poison her ailing husband, so that she may marry Matryona's weak, handsome son Nikita, who abandons for her the girl he has seduced. But Nikita soon tires of Anisya and squanders her property and goes on the spree, and after seducing her stepdaughter Akoulina, is persuaded by his wife and mother to murder and bury her baby directly it is born. In the great Russian's hands the squalors of this tragedy of vice are shown us in relation to the brooding "power of darkness," which, born of our sense of sin and evil, overhangs the stage. The drama is a pure work of art, recording with intense sincerity the psychology of the bold and crafty who cover up their sins successfully, and justify themselves thereby, despising the guilty

weaklings, such as Nikita, who falter and collapse beneath the burden of remorse. There is a prodigious wealth of colouring, popular tradition, proverbial peasant wisdom, and characteristic habits revealed in the pithy language of the characters. Matryona herself is a Russian Celestina, and an interesting analysis might be made of the element of spiritual pity which transmutes the realistic brutalities into tragic terror. In this drama Tolstoy gives full though artistic expression to his ever-lurking mediæval suspicion of woman —woman as the temptress, the sensual casket of life's seductions, woman whose function of conception is itself overlaid and entangled with inducements to sin. "A peasant woman, what is she? just mud! millions of the like in Russia, knowing nothing, all sorts of spells . . . never sees anything, never hears anything!" says the ex-soldier Mitrich. And this growing suspicion of woman's power in the scheme of things — "women are very strong, especially to-day" — was to find even stronger, almost terrifying emphasis three years later in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889).

Apart from the magnificent description, at the close, of the jealous delirium of the hero, Pozdrishef, who kills his wife in the concentration of his rage, the story is a monastic tract against sensual love, sexual dissipation, and the depravity of childless marriages. In it Tolstoy lets loose a flood of invective against "woman as an instrument of pleasure" (Matthew v. 28, 29); against "woman's arts of evoking sensuality," and he preaches complete chastity, for men to strive after. In *The Kreutzer Sonata* we witness a Russian St. Anthony, struggling fiercely against his own "unbridled temperament," hating passionately the "demon of the flesh" that tempts men to their fall. The story raised a storm of indignant reproach both from the orthodox and "the intellectuals." Tolstoy in an "Afterword" (1890) fell back on arguments tending to prove "that Christ not only never instituted marriage but even disapproved of it." He admits that the ideal of "absolute chastity" is an unattainable ideal: but asserts that we ought to strive towards it, and it is in this characteristically reversed attitude to

theory and practice that Tolstoy is so original.[1]

In *The Kreutzer Sonata* he inveighs in particular against the worldly woman for the gratification of whose luxury nine-tenths of the factories and shops exist. The subtlety of perception of the artist who wrote *Anna Karenin* had vanished for the nonce, but in *The Fruits of Culture* (1889) we are surprised and charmed by the witty lightness of touch. The satire on the imbecility of the educated folk, university professors, doctors, landowners, barristers, fashionable ladies, etc., who are seriously studying spiritualism, and are duped by the practical joke of a merry servant maid, is not only intensely amusing, but cuts like a sharp blade into the pretensions of the "intelligentsi," who are utterly super-

[1] Mr. Maude quotes an instructive conversation that he had with Tolstoy in 1896, on sexual chastity, when the great teacher remarked, "I was myself a husband last night, but that is no reason for abandoning the struggle: God may grant me not to be so again!" Again, the duality of his temperament could not be better illustrated: the moralist throve and drew his spiritual strength from continual warfare with his own sensuous vitality. He had been struggling thus for fifty years! He had had thirteen children, the last of which was born when Tolstoy was sixty, and six of whom he survived.

ficial and feather-headed about the things that matter, apart from their own comfortable existence. The comedy is set against a partially concealed background of peasant life, and gains stinging force from the contrast of the atmosphere of upper-class vacuity with that of serious realities. The extraordinary range and versatility of Tolstoy's genius was never better attested than in the few months that produced *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *The Fruits of Culture.*

Although *What is Art?* was not published till 1898, he had "had the work in hand, off and on, for fifteen years,"[1] and it will be convenient to comment, here, upon it. In this treatise, though one of exceeding value, Tolstoy tried to accomplish the impossible, and square the circle of æsthetics by the ideals of morality. In a story, years earlier,[2] Tolstoy had written: "We value only that art which purifies our thoughts and projects, raises up the soul, and increases the forces necessary to

[1] A. M., Vol. II, p. 531. But, indeed, as early as March, 1872, Tolstoy had predicted to Strahov the decline and death of artistic creations in all branches, with a renaissance of popular art to follow.

[2] *Walk in the Light*, p. 112. Dillon's translation.

a life of labour and love," and in this spirit he enunciates a brilliant series of truths, half-truths, paradoxes, false deductions, and puerilities, deducing that, since a religious perception of life means the highest good of mankind, any art that appeals only to the *élite*, or to the aristocracy of men, must be false, anti-social art! We need not dwell upon the absurdities Tolstoy's moral logic lands him in, e.g. that Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is not a true work of art, and that Jules Bréton's pictures, Dickens's *The Christmas Carol*, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, are examples of supreme art, because they flow "from love of God and man," and that whereas *Anna Karenin* is bad as art, his peasant story, *God Sees the Truth*, is in the highest rank! It is an amusing commentary on this thesis to know that the peasants who listened to a reading of *The Power of Darkness* burst into laughter at the most tragic scene, one which Tolstoy himself could not read without tears! But if Tolstoy entangles himself in circles of vicious reasoning, on the other hand his piercing instinct for whatever is false, pretentious,

artificial in human society incites him to a most destructive criticism of the feebleness, insincerity, and poverty of an enormous class of works of pseudo-art, which respond to the abnormal, languid, corrupt taste of modern patrons. By his analysis of the emotional poverty of the life of the privileged classes, who, divorced from the knowledge of actual struggle and real interest in the facts of earth, fill up the void with pride, sensuality, and weariness of life, Tolstoy drives the herd of æsthetic impostors and dilettanti before him like sheep. True, in his destructive scorn he elects himself to the office of general hangman, and passes judgment on modern schools of art which he had studied either not at all or in the most hasty fashion. But, with all its contradictions, excesses, false reasoning, and over-vehemence, *What is Art?* remains the most stimulating of all treatises on æsthetics, illuminating by its transparent errors no less than by its profundity of vision.

The Essay on *Guy de Maupassant* (1894), though a piece of special pleading, is no less illuminating in its critical penetration,

Tolstoy cleverly seizes on the French writer's exposure of Parisian Society's depravity in the 'eighties, to enforce his own arbitrary antithesis between "the sexual love of woman" and "the pure, spiritual, divine love" which seeks the good of humanity. Of course, there is no necessary hostility between the two emotions, as Turgenev's work shows; but the perverted sexual licence of French Society, which Maupassant's novels emphasise, enabled Tolstoy to etch in his critical appreciation with moral aqua-fortis. The Essay on *Shakespeare and the Drama* (1906), a remarkable *tour de force* for a man of seventy-eight! is a study in detraction, and embodies all Tolstoy's old dislike for Shakespeare, whom he acknowledged he "could not bear." The ground of his distaste is, in fact, that Shakespeare's dramas "corresponded to the irreligious and immoral frame of mind of the upper classes of his time and ours." It is interesting to note that the great democratic poet Walt Whitman was equally hostile to Shakespeare's aristocratic bent. The Essay, though full of exaggerations and animosity,

while it turns a blind eye to Shakespeare's supremacy as a creative genius, offers a very clever analysis of the artistic defects of *King Lear* and the bombastic accretions and artificial involutions of its Elizabethan plot. None but Tolstoy would have dared to challenge so aggressively Shakespeare's genius, and although the Essay shows the wilful deafness and obstinacy of old age, it is diverting to watch the collision of two talents so opposed in their philosophy of life as the great Russian's and the great Englishman's.

IX

TOLSTOY ON THE STATE—THE LIBERALS—THE GOVERNMENT—"RESURRECTION"—THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION—TOLSTOYISM—CONCLUSION

TOLSTOY'S activities, social and literary, from 1890 to 1910, in range and variety equal those of the preceding twenty years. By organising Famine Relief, 1891, he incurred the hostility of the Government, which since the accession of Alexander III in 1881, and the hanging of the Tsaricides, had been violently reactionary, doing to death, imprisoning, or banishing those free spirits, Revolutionists or Liberals, who protested against its arbitrary rule,[1] and taking away nearly all the liberties granted by Alexander II.[2] Tolstoy, most of whose

[1] Consult George Kennan's *Siberia and the Exile System.* 2 vols. 1891.

[2] "The Government of Alexander III calmly abolished everything of which the Liberals had been so proud: it limited trial by jury; abolished the office of the justice of the peace; abolished the university rights; renewed the

moral and theological writings, from 1881, had been forbidden and suppressed by the censorship (copies printed and smuggled in from abroad circulating from hand to hand),[1] was now regarded in high circles as "politically dangerous," but through fear of his unique position and world reputation, the Government did not dare to arrest him.[2] In Brückner's words :[3]

"For the first time in Russia a moral authority was able to arise and hold its ground wholly without, and indeed in opposi-

school of cadets, and even the governmental sale of liquor; legalised the use of the rod; almost abolished the County Council; gave the governors uncontrolled power; encouraged public executions; enforced administrative deportations and confinements in prisons, and the execution of political prisoners; introduced new religious persecutions, etc. etc. Though all the Liberals softly said to one another that they did not like it at all, they continued to take part in the Courts, and in the County Councils, and in the Universities, and in the Service, and in the Press. Thus all that sad activity of gibbets, rods, persecutions, and the stultification of the masses, became the subject in the Liberal newspapers of a mad eulogy of Alexander III."—Tolstoy's *Letter to the Liberals* (1896).

[1] See A. M., Vol. II, pp. 160, 189, 209, 288, 445-50, etc.

[2] For the account of Tolstoy's danger of arrest in 1886, and his aunt, the Countess A. Tolstoy's successful intervention on his behalf with Alexander III, see *Tolstoi par Tolstoi*, pp. 27-31.

[3] *A Literary History of Russia*, p. 382.

tion to, both State and Church. Though the Orthodox and the Conservatives might gnash their teeth with fury at the mere mention of his name, they did not dare to touch Tolstoy. The Plehves and other terrorists, who for nothing and less than nothing, often by sheer mistake, incarcerated thousands and made them wretched for ever, let alone the man who was a thousand times more guilty, out of dread of Europe—nay, of Russia. On this one occasion that favourite little word of theirs, the 'Phewt,' ['Away with him!'] stuck in their throats: they could exclude him from the Church or stop the printing of his missives, but they have not been able to lay hands on him. The first instance of such a moral authority in Russia. . . ."

During his terrible experiences in the Famine, 1891–2, Tolstoy was trying to finish *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1893), and it is significant that in the last chapters he turns aside from his religious arguments to depict the arbitrary and often illegal process by which the defenceless peasants, exploited by the rich, are coerced by the State, and if they resist, are flogged, shot, or imprisoned by officials and soldiers

imported into the district by the Government. In *The Letter to the Liberals*, cited below,[1] the historical logic of Tolstoy's repudiation of both the Liberals' and the Revolutionists' standpoint is indisputable. First, their programme does not work; secondly, if it worked it would be rescinded, or lead to increased lawlessness.

From the purely Christian standpoint, therefore, there is no alternative but Non-

[1] "Two methods of fighting our bad Government have hitherto been in vogue, one, revolutionary violence, which has always failed in Russia, and has only strengthened the Government's hand, by transferring to the camp of the Conservatives and retrogrades the vast number of indecisive people who have stood hitherto in the middle. Even if this revolutionary method succeeded it would have to be supported by violence, i.e. lawlessness, so the new order of things would soon be as bad as the old. But still more ineffective is the method of the 'Moderates,' i.e. fighting on a legal basis without violence, by a gradual acquisition of rights. It is ineffective because having in hand the whole power (the army, the administration, the Church, the schools, the police), and composing those very so-called laws, on the basis of which the Liberals want to fight with it, the Government knows full well what is dangerous for itself, and will never permit the people who submit to it, and who act under its guidance, to do anything which might subvert its power. Thus it will never allow the people to get any real education. Whenever any educational institutions, which are all controlled by it, seek to undermine its power it most quietly pronounces its veto, reorganizes, and closes the institutions and prohibits the publications. . . ."

Resistance, for if you once concede (as does Ballou, the American champion of Non-Resistance) that "you have a right to restrain men for their good," you are soon led back, step by step, to the necessity of approving of Christian armies and Christian Law Courts and Christian executions, and, as does Church Christianity, "you sanction everything." [1]

The closer Tolstoy looked into the economic misery of the Russian peasants and the working classes, the more he convinced himself that taxation, the usurpation of land, and the power of capitalists depend simply upon the military force in the hands of the State, and that "the root of the evil lay in the false doctrine which is taught the people under the name of Christianity." In a series of letters

[1] The Western critic in objecting with Mr. A. Maude that "'Non-Resistance' is onesided and not really true to the facts of life" is of course pointing out the central fallacy that underlies Tolstoy's contention that "humanity must be moved by moral forces and not by its animal requirements." But in so doing the critic is cutting away the spiritual roots of Tolstoy's moral grandeur. Had Tolstoy compromised and adopted the "Commonsense Christianity" of his European critics his gigantic, national figure would have shrunk into small dimensions.

and pamphlets,[1] 1894–1900, he accordingly attacked, with increasing vehemence, the principle of the State and Orthodox Christianity, with the result of his excommunication, in 1901, by the Holy Synod, as "a new false teacher." In 1895 he had written an appeal for the Doukhobors,[2] and in 1899 his novel, *Resurrection*. This last work is of exceeding importance, not only for its surpassing descriptions of official Russian life and of Russian prison administration, but because it brings into one artistic nucleus and expresses with the most adroit and passionate sincerity all the humanitarian convictions of Tolstoy's gospel of the brotherhood of men. The central flaw in *Resurrection* is the unreality of the hero, Nehludov, not a man at all, but an automatic spectator of the extraordinarily vivid and remorselessly truthful series of scenes in Russian law courts and prisons. The figure of Maslova, the prosti-

[1] *Christianity and Patriotism*, 1894. *Patriotism and Peace: The Approach of the End*, 1896. *The Christian Teaching*, 1897. *The Hague Conference. Two Wars. Carthago Delenda Est.* 1899. *The Slavery of Our Times. Patriotism and Government*, 1900.

[2] See A. M., Vol. II, chapter XIV., and A. Maude, *A Peculiar People: the Doukhobors.*

tute, seduced in girlhood by Nehludov, gives Tolstoy scope for his final repudiation of "the terrible animal man" who in carnal love seeks only his own enjoyment. *Resurrection* is, as it were, the city of refuge in which the many contradictory roads of life that have opened themselves before the author of *Anna Karenin* are lost sight of at the gates. *Resurrection* is the stronghold of a human faith common to all communities of men, a faith which even the hardest and most callous spirits subscribe to in the hour of suffering—the faith of man's mercy towards man. Briefly, the import of the book may be said to lie in its demonstration of how a society's conventional morality tends to become a crushing instrument for evil in the powerful hands of the State. Without question, *Resurrection* as a document, as a creed, as a piece of art, fittingly sums up Tolstoy's life-work, and incorporates all the essential ideas on the problems of society that he has originated in analysing human life. It is idle to speculate whether the art of *Resurrection* would not be greater had the author lost consciousness of his ethical

doctrine. Certainly the lines of *Resurrection* are as inflexible as iron; but, in its severe strength and simplicity, it recalls some great bronze, with its relief of a procession of human figures. The author's indignation and pity at the stupidity of mankind has given *Resurrection* a grandeur of design and an artistic unity which will make it endure through the generations, even as Juvenal endures to this day. Though *Resurrection* is essentially Russian, its spirit may be looked upon as the highest expression of the general humanitarian movement of the nineteenth century, and as foreshadowing the change slowly appearing in the European mind in regard to war. The novel itself, however, is a genuine growth of the Russian soil, and apart from its general significance to the ideas of the age, its teaching must be regarded as the *way of escape* open to the Russian spirit struggling against its inherent vices, and their crystallisation in the Russian Government. The triumph of *Resurrection* is that it demonstrates that official Russia has elaborated a complex structure of State-regulated morality, equally false in relation

to the facts of the people's life and the needs of their soul. In *Resurrection* we have the whole imposing machinery of State Justice sketched for us, and we behold it at work distorting the humane instincts, the common sense, the very impulse of justice in every living man and woman brought within reach to assist at its triumph. The great State that perpetually manufactures criminals by its organisation of compulsory military service, its drink traffic, its grinding taxation of the peasant, its legalised corruption among officials, its suppression of the private individual's efforts to organise education—the State that has exiled the finest flower of its intellectual youth—fabricates a false State morality out of the very mouths of those whose livelihood depends upon keeping themselves in perpetual power.

The Address to the Czar and his Assistants (1901), which demands (*a*) that the peasants shall be given equal rights with other Russians, (*b*) the abolition of repressive enactments violating the Code, (*c*) Liberty of Education, (*d*) Liberty of Religion, brought Tolstoy great popularity

which disappeared three years later, when he refused to budge from his attitude of Non-Resistance. In a letter to *The Times* (March, 1905), on the St. Petersburg massacre of January 22–4, he gave his reasons for refusing to support the Russian Revolution, which we summarise below.[1]

[1] "The higher men are in religious, moral states, the less governmental coercion and corresponding evil will there be. The particularly cruel, coarse, stupid, and deceitful Russian Government is such because the society it rules is morally weak, the ambitious and avaricious seizing power from the timid and stupid. However much these people change places an equally coercive Government will result. The Liberal programme—Freedom of the Press, freedom of conscience, right of assembly, a Parliament, an eight hours' working day, etc.—does not represent the demands of the hundred million of the peasantry. The peasants demand the liberation of the land from the law of property, and common ownership of the land. . . . One cannot do two things at once, morally perfect oneself and participate in political action, which means all kinds of strife, extending to militarism and murder. To improve oneself morally requires effort, but men imagine that they will improve their lives through reconstructing social forms without making this effort, with the result that the true progress of mankind is arrested. If the despotism of the Russian Government were to be replaced by a Constitutional one, such national depravities as the reckless and disgraceful Japanese-Russo War which has destroyed and mutilated hundreds of thousands of Russians would occur just the same. All the European Constitutional States are incessantly and senselessly arming themselves for war. The Russian Government, like every Government, is a dreadful inhuman and powerful robber. To free oneself from these Governments it is only necessary to abstain

Tolstoy's prophecy was fulfilled. The Constitutionalists failed to achieve anything, in spite of the mock-concession of representative government granted in the Manifesto of October 30, 1905, and the subsequent reaction, 1905–10, the floggings, tortures, imprisonments, deportations, and hangings,[1] by which the Autocracy revenged itself upon the Revolutionists, showed, in Tolstoy's words, that "the cruel, coarse, stupid, and deceitful Russian Government is such because the society it rules is morally weak."

Alike by the logic of political events, the increase of his peasant sympathies, and the decrease of his intellectual interests, Tolstoy's later teaching championed "the agricultural nations" against the demands of the State and the progress of modern civilisation; and in *The End of the Age* (1906), as in *Three Days in the Village*

from participating in them and supporting them. Our consciousness of the law of God demands from us only one thing, moral self-perfection, i.e. the liberation of oneself from all those weaknesses and vices which make one the slave of Governments and the participation in their crimes."

[1] See *The Terror in Russia*, by Prince Kropotkin. Fourth edition. 1909.

(1910), he dwells on the necessity of abolishing "land-slavery," laying down the thesis that the town workmen were not free men, and that their interests were necessarily entwined with those of the rich, ruling classes.

Just as the key to Tolstoy's genius is that up to 1876 he applied his rich artistic-sensuous and spiritual-moral equipment to the delineation of Russian life, and afterwards, the animal, sensuous strain lessening, he developed into a humanitarian moralist, so the key to Tolstoyism is that it is an appeal from the typical Russian vices—arbitrary and unbridled passions, moral instability, and an indifference to personal liberty—to a religion of pity and charity.

The posthumous play *The Light that Shines in Darkness*[1] documents the tragedy

[1] We must discuss elsewhere the posthumous writings, among which the novel *Hadji-Murat* is of the first importance for the sparkling artistic contrast drawn between the life of the Caucasian mountaineers and Russian civilised officers, and its merciless sardonic portrait of the Autocrat Nicholas I. Next to this ranks *The Devil*, a sequel to *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *The Man who was Dead*, a drama. *The Forged Coupon*, though a powerful study of an immoral deed begetting a cycle of evil deeds, is of the didactic *genre*.

of Tolstoy's dissensions with his wife and family, whose attitude may be summed up in one of the characters' accusation, "You have invented a new Christian creed that causes diabolical suffering to everyone round you," while Tolstoy's own standpoint is given in the reply, "See how the misery of the peasants is connected with our pleasures." In the fragment *There are No Guilty People*, he writes, "There was a time when I tried to change my position which was not in harmony with my conscience; but the conditions created by the past, by my family and its claims upon me, were so complicated that I did not know how to free myself. I had not the strength. Now, that I am over eighty and have become feeble I have given up trying to free myself. Strange to say, as my feebleness increases I realise more and more strongly the wrongfulness of my position, and it grows more and more intolerable to me."

And, on October 28, 1910, so Mr. Maude tells us,[1] "the clash of wills between Tolstoy and his wife had produced a

[1] A. M., Vol. II, p. 658.

tension which had now reached breaking point," and Tolstoy at last put into action his long-deferred intention of abandoning his home and family. Accompanied by his doctor, Makovetsky, he set out early in the morning, paid a visit the next day to his sister Mary at the Shamordin Convent, and then resolved to leave Russia, but was taken ill in the train, and died at Astapovo, after an illness of a week, on November 7, 1910. In a pathetic letter to his wife dated June 8, 1897, which was found among his papers after his death, he describes how he had, ever since 1881, "long been tormented by the discord between my life and beliefs," and how he had "now decided to go away," not blaming his wife for not following him, but "recalling with love and gratitude the long thirty-five years of our life together." And for thirteen long years he could not summon up sufficient resolution to break the tie.

Among his last words were the touching "I am tired of this world of men" and "there are many other people in the world, and you attend only to this Leo"

—which might indeed serve as an epitaph for the tomb of the man of whom the great Turgenev had said with his characteristic generosity, "... What am I worth compared to him? In contemporary European literature he has no equal. Whatever he takes up it all becomes alive under his pen. And how wide the sphere of his 'creative' power—it is simply amazing."[1]

[1] A. M., Vol. II, p. 19.

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